

16 England - Charles II. 1687

SOME
CONSIDERATIONS

Humbly offer'd

5,

Upon the Present Attempt
OF THE
DISSENTERS,
To obtain a Repeal of the
TEST ACT.

Address'd to a
Member of Parliament.

England - Laws and Statutes - VIII

125 CHA. II. C. 2

We—after mature Deliberation resolv'd and determin'd to enter into a mutual and Solemn League and Covenant, wherein we all subscribe, and each one of us for himself, with our Hands lifted up to the most high God, do swear—That we shall without respect of Persons endeavour the Extermination of Popery and Prelacy, that is, Church Government by Archbishops, Bishops, Deans and Chapters, Archdeacons, and all other Ecclesiastical Officers depending on that Hierarchy.

Vide Solemn League and Covenant.

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CONSTITUTIONAL

OF THE

DISSENT

to obtain a repeal of the

ACT

of 1845



of the British Museum

of the British Museum

T O

Sir *****

Member of *Parliament* for
the Borough of -----

Worthy SIR,

S I N C E we have had the News that
there is like to be a Motion made
in your Honourable House, for the
Repeal of the Sacramental Test Act,
in order to let Dissenters into Publick Trusts
and Employments, great has been our Solli-
citude and Anxiety about the Issue of it.

The

The whole Body of this Corporation, tho' they are known by all to be eminently well-affected to his Most Excellent Majesty King GEORGE, and to be far from envying the Dissenters the Toleration they enjoy, are also equally Zealous for the keeping up this important Fence, and Barrier of our Establish'd Church and Religion.

What hath occasionally been said against this Repeal I have collected together, and here send you ; a Freedom which I should not have taken, but that I find great Numbers of other People have us'd the same Liberty ; publishing their indecent Reflections upon this wise and excellent Law, with as much Boldness, as if it were no better than one of the French King's Edicts, with which the People of England are no way concern'd.

I must humbly ask your Pardon for the Presumption of this Address, and am with the highest Respect,

S I R,

Your most obedient

Humble Servant.

*Some CONSIDERATIONS humbly
offer'd upon the Present Attempt of the
Dissenters, to obtain a Repeal of the
T E S T A C T.*

IT looks as if some People thought our Animosities were in too fair a Way to be compos'd, when they are so industrious to throw in among us, *new* Matter of Difference, and Contention. It was the hope and desire of all wise and good Men upon his late Majesty's Accession to the Crown, that all who do indeed love their King and Country wou'd lay aside their private little Quarrels, and unanimously unite their Endeavours to promote the common Good. But alas! what Fruit have we seen of those Desires, and how have those Hopes been utterly frustrated! Disappointed Expectations have fill'd the Hearts of some with Disaffection; which join'd with the fix'd and rooted Hatred of others, hath produc'd the most wicked and Unnatural Clamours.

And now an unreasonable *Selfishness* and *Perverseness* is like to involve us in great Difficulties, and perhaps, in the end, may bring us into Dangers almost equal to those we have so lately escap'd. One would think that Men who duly consider their former Hardships and Sufferings, shou'd be very well contented with so full and ample *Toleration* as they now enjoy: and not aim at more Power than they *themselves* know well how to manage, or than can safely be trusted in their Hands by *others*. And, indeed, I think if it were only in Gratitude to those, who have been the Instruments of *giving*, and *preserving* to them what they *have*, they ought not to
attempt

attempt the gaining *more*, to the prejudice of their Friends; and very probably, to their own Loss at last.

That which I shall farther do in the Prosecution of this Argument, will be only to propose a few Reasons, which convince me that there is no just Ground for the *Dissenters* to desire the Repeal of the *Test-Act*, and that the doing so, wou'd be infinitely prejudicial to our Constitution in Church and State.

sect. 1. Now the first thing that comes into my mind concerning this Matter, is, that this *Act* leaves them in the full Possession of all that they us'd formerly to claim, or desire, I mean the Liberty of Worshipping God according to their Consciences, without Molestation, or Disturbance, It only restrains them from a Practice not only very offensive to all good Christians, but even to the best among the *Dissenters* themselves, who (however, they may sometimes join in our Publick Worship to manifest their Catholick Communion) yet can never justify Mens doing so, once in their Lives, meerly to qualify themselves for Places and Preferments.

When the *Dissenters* were under Persecution and Sufferings, they then declar'd, they desir'd only *Liberty* and *Toleration*; It looks a little ill therefore, now they have got *that* in as full a manner as can be desir'd, to make such a bustle for more *Power* than is consistent with the Safety of our Constitution; and gives Occasion to their Enemies to suggest, that, give them what you will, they are not to be satisfy'd with less than the Destruction of it.

sect. 2. I observe in the next place, that notwithstanding the Clamours they now make against this *Act*, as obtain'd by Men who were not only their Enemies, but equal Enemies to the *Protestant Succession*, &c. I say, notwithstanding these Clamours, that this *Act* as it now is, is nothing but what was readily offer'd by the best Friends to the *Protestant Succession*, and most zealous Advocates for *Toleration*. This is evident from the *Act* for preventing Occasional Conformity, as it was amended and agreed to by the Lords, in 1072. They then were all agreed, that

that Occasional Conformity to qualify for Preferments was a Scandal to Religion, and ought to be punish'd, and prevented. What Objections they had against the Bill as sent up by the *Commons*, were not taken from the Matter, but some of the Circumstances of it; such as the Penalty's being too great for the Offence, and other things of less moment.

But that which seem'd most of all to prevail for the Rejection of such an Act at *that* time (and is as good an Argument against the Repeal of it, in *this*) was the *Unseasonableness* of it. The *Lords* thought that in a Time of War, Alterations were unnecessary and dangerous; and were unwilling to bring any Hardships upon the *Dissenters* at such a time, to give them cause of Jealousies and Fears: And they tell the *Commons*, that tho' there may be some things to be found fault with, yet a proper time ought to be taken to apply Remedies; and that the attempting too hasty Cures have prov'd fatal. Now can any thing be stronger against the *Repeal* of this Act at this time, even supposing (which I see no Reason to suppose) that it is a little hard upon them? For let only any one consider our present Circumstances, and tell me if he thinks *this* a proper Season to make such Concessions to them? Our Governours may, perhaps, gratify a few enterprizing Men among the *Dissenters*; but they will lose the Hearts of a much greater Number of their true Friends in the Church of *England*, or at least administer great cause of Fear, and Jealousy to them; and give a handle to declar'd Enemies, to reproach, and malign their Administration.

And this is, with me, one of the strongest Arguments against the Repeal of this Act of Parliament. I love the King, and am perswaded there is not a Man in His Dominions wishes the Prosperity of his Government with more Zeal, and Sincerity. Those whose Interest it is to have it believ'd, may represent all that wish well to our Establish'd Church, as *Jacobites* and *Tories*; but there is

no Man who truly values the Church of *England*, and understands it's true Interest, but must be a Friend to King *GEORGE*, who, under God, is the great Bulwark, and only Support of it. This is so evident, that the most blind and obstinate must at last see, and be convinc'd of it. But, if instead of doing what we can to take off Mens Prejudices, we go into Measures that naturally tend to *encrease* them; and set them at a farther distance from us, we *make* Enemies, and have no body else to thank for them. We may talk as long, and complain as much as we please of Mens Disaffection, Fear, and Jealousies; but nothing will cure, and remove them but a steady Adherence to the Interests of the Church of *England*, and an immoveable Zeal for the Prosperity of our Nation; and this, at last, will make our Enemies to be at Peace With us.

sect. 3. It is really a thing just and equitable in it self, that they who are profess'd Enemies to one half (at least) of the Constitution, should be excluded from any share in the Government of it. I do allow that the *Dissenters* are generally in the Interest of the King, and *Protestant Succession*. It is evidently their Advantage to be so; and *they* are not so blind, (as some are who call themselves *Churchmen*) to imagine that they can be secure under any other sort of Government. It is therefore no such mighty Wonder that they have been zealous for King *George*, when 'tis clear, they can't possibly be safe under any other. *And verily they have their reward.*

I cannot but wonder therefore at the Boasts of some of their late Writers, as if they were the only *disinterested Loyalists* in the Nation. *It will certainly (says one of them) be hard if when they can gain nothing that is peculiar to themselves by the Accession of King George, they mayn't be allow'd to hope they shall lose nothing by him.* So that we see they have no other Principle of Loyalty to the King, but the expectation of getting by him: And 'tis not sufficient that they are protected and secur'd in the enjoyment of all their Rights, Civil and Religious, in common with other Subjects; they must have some thing

thing *peculiar* to themselves; the plain *English* of which is, that they would be set upon an *equal* foot with the Church of *England*, and by that means gain an Opportunity of setting themselves *above* it. If the Government will not come into *this* Scheme, notwithstanding their Pretences of bearing so much, and complaining so little (a Character that was never given them, by any, but themselves) they do in effect say, they are like to be as uneasy, and as little ven to Loyalty, as those of whom they make such sad Complaints.

We grant they are now Friends to the Civil Government, but as to the other half of our Constitution, they are declared and avowed Enemies, and will destroy it as soon as they are able. And they seem to want Power for such a Purpose. Some will say, perhaps, No such Matter; they only desire *Toleration*. Let such a Person only suppose himself in *their* Case, that is, *Tolerated* to worship God in a Way, esteem'd by them, most agreeable to the Divine Will; while the greater Part of the Nation, in their Opinion, lie under the Power of gross Superstition, if not Idolatry, which some of them charge us with.) Now can any Thing be more natural to Men, who have this Opinion of *themselves* and *others*, than to endeavour the advancing of *that*, which they account the Religion of Jesus Christ, and Exirpation of what they call Superstition and Idolatry? And the more *honest* and *serious* such Men are in their mistaken Way, the more Mischief they are like to do; which, I think, is a sufficient Argument against trusting them with Power, till they know better how to use it.

This is so plain from *Experience*, that it can scarce admit of any Dispute. For twenty Years together, our *English* History is fill'd up with Accounts of their manifold Endeavours, to destroy the Establish'd Church and Religion; and various Methods to prevent its ever rising again.

There are scarce any so ignorant in History as to be unacquainted with the *Solemn League and Covenant*, which vow'd the utter Subversion of *Archbishops*, *Bishops*, *Deans*, *Archdeacons*, &c. and the whole Frame of our Church-Government;

vernment; or with their *Directory* and *Ordinances* relating to it, which thrust out our *Common-Prayer*, and made it highly Peral to use it, even in a Private Family; to which they adher'd so strictly, that they would not dispense with the Use of it, to the *King* himself, when he fell into their Power; nor so much as suffer him to be Buried by the Office appointed in the Book of *Common-Prayer*, tho' it was earnestly desired. They were *then* the most zealous Opposers of *Toleration*; and treated the most Moderate Men with the same Violence under which their greatest Enemies suffer'd. To be a *Bishop*, without any Thing more, was Crime enough to entitle them to a *sequestration*, and the other Calamities of those wretched Times. It is a Piece of Justice therefore, which we owe our most excellent Constitution, to keep *Power* out of the Hands of Men who think themselves oblig'd to employ it for its Destruction.

Some say indeed, that they are much alter'd now, from what they *then* were. And I believe, *some* of them are; tho' I see no Occasion in the World to try whether they are or not. I don't know, nor do they *themselves* know, but that if they have an Opportunity, the best of them may alter again. And then, what a blessed Comfort it will be, to say, — Who would have thought it.

I will leave it therefore as a first Principle confirm'd by Reason and Experience, that the most effectual Way to preserve a National Church, is, by keeping the Civil Power in the Hands of those, whose Practices and Principles are conformable to it.

It hath, indeed, been pretended, that *Occasional Conformity* to qualify for Perferments, has been a Means of reconciling the Affections of *Dissenters* to the Church, and brought them to constant Communion. This 'tis probable, hath been some times the Case; but sure not often enough to compensate for the Mischief it has done the Church, to let them have the Encouragement of *Places* and *Preferments*.

The *Dissenters* are a cunning subtle Body of Men, and well *understand* their own Interest. And (tho' *we* are often such Fools as to do so) *they* never do any Thing that is evidently *inconsistent* with it. If they were convinc'd that the Repeal of the *Test Act*, did *them* any Hurt, or us any Good, they would never stickle so zealously for the Repeal of this *Act*, made on Purpo'e to prevent it. No, they know that the incapacitating them from Preferments is a Discouragement that naturally tends to weaken their Interest and decrease their Number; and will probably, in Time, be the best Means to reconcile them generally to the Church of *England*.

Self. 4. I think the late and present Temper and Behaviour of the *Dissenters*, is another Argument aginst the Repeal of this *Act*. For when was there a Time since the *Toleration*, in which they have so violently assaulted, and insulted the Church of *England*? They have treated it with the same kind of Respect the World does a Man, who is going down the Wind. Their Pamphlets for Number and Bitterness have exceeded former Times, as much as the present easie Circumstances are better than they then were. I cannot think that they are in a fit Disposition for more Power, when they do so notoriously abuse that which they at present enjoy. Let them Learn and Study to be quiet, and mind their own *Meetings* rather than thus follow the Church of *England* with their insolent Libels, in Contempt to the *Acts of Uniformity*, without the least Pretence to *Toleration* for such enormous Licentiousness. And when they use the Power they *now* have, as they should do, it will be Time enough to think of giving them *more*.

Nor do I think it a Thing altogether improper to be observed, that the *Dissenters* take as much Freedom with the *State*, as they have done with the *Church*, in thus openly reflecting upon, and arraigning this *Act*, made for the Security of it. When *Sacheverell* reflected upon the *Toleration Act*, It was justly thought a heinous Offence; and he was *Impeach'd* for it by the Honourable House of Commons. It was accounted a Thing not fit to be endured;

durd, and of dangerous Consequences, that private Men should take the Liberty to speak in that Manner against a Law in Being. And yet how does the Nation swarm with Pamphlets against *this* Law? How is it expos'd as an *Act* unjust in it self, mischievous in its Consequences, and, in a Word, represented as the Shame, and Scandal of our Nation? And yet this *Act* for the better security of the Church of England, was made by the same Supreme, and high Authority, that establish'd the *Toleration*: These People should consider what they do, when they *Act* in this Manner; for if *they* may take the Liberty of Writing against *one Act of Parliament*, I see no Reason, why *other* Men (if they think fit) may not write against *another*, even tho' it should happen to be the *Act of Toleration*.

sect. 5. I cannot conceive that there is the least Occasion for them in the Administration of Affairs, and consequently there can be no just Reason of this Repeal. Yes, they say, the Number of those that are Enemies to the present Government is so great, that the *Dissenters* should be taken in to be a Ballance to them. I hope there is not so great a Number of Enemies employ'd by the Government: If there be, the Remedy is easie, and ready—turn them out, and put in honest Men. There are enough such, unprovided for, who will be glad to fill their Places; and there is no need of taking in another sort of Enemies, for that Purpose.

As to what they talk of *Justices* of the Peace, *Magistrates* in Corporations, and *Officers* in the *Lieutenancy*, not well-affect'd to the Government, the Remedy is also easie, without taking in *Dissenters*. There are few Places (I profess I know not any) where there may not be found a Supply of Persons, who heartily love King *GEORGE*, to fill up such important Stations. But these People take a Pleasure in magnifying themselves, and lessening the Number of the Friends of the Government, only that they may be thought, the more necessary to its Support. And yet nothing can be more certain, than that to put *them* into Offices of this kind,

would

would do the *King* a much greater prejudice than all his Enemies that are now in such Places, if they really were as many as they (to serve their own Turns) represent them.

Their Talk of the necessity of this, in order to secure a good Parliament at next Election has nothing in it, unless we suppose, if the *Dissenters* be not put into Places, they will join with the *Jacobites* and *Tories*; which I believe, their own Interest will restrain 'em from doing; and if it won't, I wish 'em no worse Reward of their Folly than the Consequences of it. For my own part, I can't help thinking that they do much more good in Elections, *as they are*, than they could possibly do if they were much greater; it having been my Observation all along, that Country People had much rather *lead* the *Dissenters*, than *follow* them at Elections.

But when they have nothing left to offer for this Purpose, from the Advantage the *Government* may gain by their Preferments, we are then urg'd with an inherent Claim of *Right* to them. But sure Men are not *born* Magistrates, nor has every Person in the Society a Right to Govern in it. *That* arises from the Qualifications which the supreme Power supposes necessary to the Discharge of Publick Trusts, and their Opinion that such and such Persons are possess'd of them. If it were otherwise, the *Papists* may as well plead their *Birth-right* to Places, as the *Presbyterians*. Indeed, there is this difference, that the *Papists* are Enemies to the *whole* of our Constitution, whereas the *other* are only Enemies to *half* of it: But I see no reason that Men should be employ'd in the Conduct of the Publick Interest, who will not, nay cannot undertake to be faithful to our *Whole* and *Entire* Constitution; but on the contrary have a separate Interest carrying on, in direct Opposition to it. If Men break themselves off from the Body, they ought to be thankful that they are still nourish'd and protected; but there can be no Pretence for an amputated Member's putting in a Claim, to Order and Direct those that continue to adhere to it.

Self. 6. Let it be considered, that how much soever one Party among the *Dissenters* may be oblig'd, and serve themselves by this Repeal, yet *all* the rest will be made uneasy, and put under Apprehensions upon it. For they are all very jealous of the *Presbyterian* Party, and cannot bear the thoughts of *their* being possess'd of too great a share of Power; well knowing by experience, that it is apt to intoxicate 'em, and push 'em upon much greater Severities against other People than they seem to care for themselves.

Self. 7. I desire in the last place it may be considered, that as the *Dissenters* build their hopes of success in this matter, on their Loyalty to his Majesty King *GEORGE*, so it is certain, that if the Church of *England* had not also been equally active and zealous in his Defence, *their* Efforts would have done but little good. And since *they* are rewarded with the Security of the *Toleration* (which they pretended to esteem as a much greater Blessing than Places and Preferments) it is but reasonable they should be *therewith* content; and suffer *us* to enjoy our *Establishment* in as much Peace and Safety, as they do their *Toleration*; which they would think very much endanger'd by being made to depend on the Pleasure of those, who had always shewn, that they never wanted *Will*, when they had *Power* to destroy it.

But they tell you, that their possessing *Places*, gives them no Capacity to overturn the Church; and, I remember, the *Querist* says, that in their *present* Circumstances 'tis next to impossible they should attempt it. And I believe, indeed, that it is not at present in their *Intention* to do this; nor in their *Power* if they should intend it. The Danger will arise from the growth and increase of their Power, with which Mens Dispositions do frequently change and alter. *Am I a Dog*, said *Hazael*, *that I shou'd do this thing?* And yet he afterwards did it without Scruple.

They are very ignorant of the State of our Affairs, who do not know that it hath been the Manner of this *Set* to proceed from Evil to Worse, since the very beginning of it. At the first they only disliked some *Ceremonies*, and could pretty well digest Conformity in the rest. In a little time they manifested a dislike of *Episcopal Government*, being better affected to the Device of *Calvin*; and together with that, they distasted also our *Common-Prayer*. From a *Dislike* some proceeded to think them *Unlawful*, and then fell into a Contempt of *Bishops* and the *Prayers*, bitterly railing against them. From hence they advanced to open *Disobedience* to all the Orders of the Church, and at last *renounc'd* it, and *rent* themselves from it esteeming themselves the only Brethren and Congregation of the Faithful. The next thing was to undermine and destroy the *Establish'd Church and Religion*; and by what, almost imperceptible Steps and Degrees, this was at last effected, is known to all, who are in the least acquainted with the History of those Times. When their usurp'd Dominion was, by God's Blessing, wrested out of their Hands, then give them but an *Indulgence* for their tender Consciences and they ask no more. *This* is freely granted them; but are they contented with it? Nothing less! Now they must have Liberty to *Print, Publish*, and spread abroad their *Pamphlets* and *Libels* to bring the *Establish'd Church and Religion* into Contempt. But even this alone will not do, without Liberty to set up *Schools* and *Seminaries* in order to propagate, and perpetuate their unreasonable Separation. And when even this is indulg'd them, if they have not likewise *Places* and *Preferments*, what an Outcry do they make of *Neglect, Hardships* and *Persecution*? Now if in compliance with these importunate Clamours, the Government should let them into the best *Posts* and *Preferments* in the Kingdom, would it be at all strange if they advanced one Step further, and tumble those down, who were the means of raising them?

I cannot positively affirm that this would be the Consequence, but do verily believe there is reason enough to fear it. Let *them* therefore, in the Name of God, enjoy their *Toleration* in the fullest manner the Law has granted it : But let *us* take heed lest we are drawn into Measures that will expose us to the Necessity of a *Toleration*, which perhaps if we should need, they may not be dispos'd to grant us, tho' we should seek it *carefully with Tears*. But from *that*, Good Lord deliver us.

F I N I S.

